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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES LEGISLATION  
GAINS MOMENTUM

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (U) SUMMARY: The Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and International Republican Institute (IRI) hosted a workshop on "Mainstreaming People with Disabilities into Political Parties" in Abuja on October 30. During the workshop, House of Representatives Member and Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Beni Lar (PDP-Plateau State) announced that the House would conduct a public hearing on the People With Disabilities (PWD) Bill on November 26 and she was hopeful the Bill would be signed and moved forward to the President. House of Representatives Member Farouk Lawan (PDP-Kano State) called for parity in the treatment of PWD in Nigeria and the establishment of a National Commission. PDP National Chairman Prince Vincent Ogbulafor said in his remarks that the party was committed to facilitating laws aimed at mainstreaming disability issues and would consider creating a disability desk at the party National Secretariat. With such influential people advocating for the PWD Bill, it has a good chance of becoming law. On November 3, the PDP and IRI donated 40 wheelchairs, 18 pairs of crutches, and dozens of Braille books and watches to the Joint National Association of People With Disabilities (JONAPWD), an umbrella organization for PWD NGOs. END SUMMARY

12. (U) During an October 30 workshop titled "Mainstreaming People With Disabilities into Political Parties, Member of the House of Representatives and Chair of the House Committee on Human Rights, Beni Lar, announced that on November 26, the House will hold a public hearing on the People With Disabilities Bill. Lar added that the Senate might decide to hold a joint hearing and there was a good chance the bill would be passed in both chambers that day. If that happens, she added, the bill would then go to the President for assent. Lar reported that according to recent estimates by the United Nations, there were over 19 million Nigerians with disabilities who deal with stigma and discrimination on a daily basis. Lar described some of the challenges faced by PWD, such as lack of ramps in public buildings, lack of assistance at polling stations and inability to gain employment. Although section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution provides a general statement of human rights that includes PWD, access to those rights are not enforced and PWD remain a neglected segment of Nigeria's society.

13. (U) Farouk Lawan, House of Representatives Member and leader of the Integrity Group, called for equality in the

treatment of Nigerians living with disabilities. Lawan stated that "everyone has challenges" in one form or another, but that it should not bar or deter anyone from participating in politics. Lawan added that he would be in support of a National Commission to address the inequalities and issues that PWD face. In an effort to help others understand what it means to be disabled, Lawan shared a plan for the "One Day of Disability Experience" that will take place at the National Assembly. According to Lawan, on December 5, members of the House and Senate have agreed to come to work either blindfolded, with their ears plugged, or in a wheelchair to understand the difficulties that PWD experience on a daily basis.

¶4. (C) PDP National Chairman Prince Vincent Ogbulafor delivered a welcome address in which he suggested that his party would consider creating a disability desk at the PDP National Secretariat. Ogbulafor stated that the PDP supported legal policies that would help create equality for PWD and he urged lawmakers and other political parties to follow suit. (NOTE: A USAID colleague in attendance noted that while Ogbulafor delivered his remarks, he had someone sit next to him and whisper the words of the speech into his ear. At one point, he apparently stumbled over words and motioned to his assistant to move closer. It was a strange occurrence as the room was quite small and it was obvious what was happening. It was unclear, however, if Ogbulafor was just having trouble with his glasses, or what the reason might have been for this strange occurrence. Ogbulafor himself gave no explanation. END NOTE.)

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¶5. (U) At a November 3 press conference, the PDP and IRI presented 40 wheelchairs, 18 pairs of crutches, numerous writing slates, and dozens of Braille books and watches to the Joint National Association of People With Disabilities (JONAPWD), the umbrella organization for several NGOs focused on the rights of People With Disabilities (PWD). The giveaway was initially scheduled to take place during the opening ceremony of the IRI/PDP-sponsored workshop, but the truck transporting the items broke down en route to the workshop.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Representatives Beni Lar and Farouk Lawan are active members of the National Assembly and highly regarded by civil society. With Lar and Lawan advocating for the bill, and added support from the PDP, Post believes the PWD Bill has a very good chance of being passed. If the bill is indeed signed into law, it could pave the way for other equal opportunity laws that would address gender issues, child rights, and people living with HIV/AIDS. Post will attend the November 26 public hearing and report the results septel. END COMMENT.

¶7. (C) BIO NOTE: Beni Lar is the daughter of former Plateau State Governor Solomon Lar and was elected to the House of Representatives in 2007. Before becoming Chair of the Human Rights Committee in October, Lar served as Chair of the Committee for Women's Affairs and Social Development. She is one of the youngest members of the Nigerian House of Representatives.

¶8. (U) This cable coordinated with Consulate Lagos. Sanders